

Opening Remarks
Congressman Dennis J. Kucinich
“An Examination of the United States’ Drone Policy
Friday, November 16, 2012

I would like to thank you all for joining me today for this very important briefing.

I would especially like to thank our panelists for leading us today in a timely discussion of the United States’ combat drone policy, which has significant ramifications on both a domestic and international level.

Over the past four years, drone strikes have increased in number dramatically and are occurring in countries such as Pakistan and Yemen. In many cases, these drone strikes are occurring far from any internationally recognized battlefield. Despite claims by the Administration that the strikes cause few – if any – civilian casualties and are vital to our national security, there is increasing evidence that such strikes cause significant harm to civilian populations and serve as a powerful recruitment tool for terrorists.

Thus far, Congress has been denied the right to read the legal framework used by the Administration to justify the drone strikes. This means that these strikes are being carried out with virtually no transparency, accountability or judicial review. Victims or targets of the strikes are denied the right to due process. Innocent civilians and American citizens are getting the death penalty without so much as a trial. We do not know what measures, if any, the Joint Special Operations Command or the Central Intelligence Agency have for recognizing harm to civilian populations or to conduct investigations of who was killed.

As the use of drone strikes abroad becomes a permanent feature of our counterterrorism policy, it is more critical than ever that we push for increased transparency and accountability. We must reject the notion that Congress and the American people have to be kept in the dark on U.S. counterterrorism strategies. Simply put, drones must be subject to the same scrutiny and laws that other weapons the United States employs.

This is the new war. It is defined less by geography, than technology. This change in definition allows the President – Democrat or Republican – to concentrate the power of declaring war into his or her hands. This change in war governance also allows the President to bypass the now out of date legal and constitutional infrastructure that was constructed to ensure war is a last resort, not a first resort. This is a critical time for us to stand up and say “we see what is happening here and we won’t stand for it.”

We have a great set of panelists who will be addressing multiple aspects of our combat drone policy:

Professor James Cavallaro (Cava- larr-o) is the founding director of Stanford Law School’s International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic. He has dedicated his career to human rights, working on human rights issues in Latin America and in developing countries around the world. He is an expert on International Human Rights law and practice and is the coauthor of a recent report on drones titled: “Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians From U.S. Drone Practices in Pakistan.”

Mr. Frank Jannuzi is the Deputy Executive Director of Amnesty International USA and is head of their Washington, D.C. office. He is an international affairs policy and political expert who most recently served Chairman John Kerry as Policy Director for East Asian and Pacific Affairs for the Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. While in the Senate, Mr. Jannuzi worked on human rights legislation and conducted field investigations into human rights and security concerns in numerous East Asian countries.

Mr. Bob Naiman is the Policy Director at Just Foreign Policy and writes on U.S. foreign policy. He is president of the board of Truthout and has previously worked as a policy analyst and researcher at the Center for Economic and Policy Research and Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch.

Medea Benjamin is cofounder of the international human rights organization Global Exchange and CODEPINK. She has been an advocate for social justice for more than 30 years and is the author of "Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control."